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*The Tribute Money*

Etching

An Exhibition of Etchings and Dry-Points by Rembrandt

AMONG painter-etchers none can stand beside Rembrandt in importance. None has so constantly engaged the attention of connoisseurs, of amateurs and writers—old and new—as the great Dutch master of the seventeenth century. The tercentenary celebration of Rembrandt's birth (1906) has contributed further important additions to his extensive bibliography.* It is most interesting to con these results of careful research and thorough study, which must awaken in the reader a keen desire to form his own judgment by actually seeing these subjects of animated discussion and plausible hypothesis. As regards Rembrandt's paintings, this possibility is generally quite remote, as his pictures are mostly scattered among distant galleries. But if the master was prolific as a painter, he was no less so in confiding his artistic conceptions to the copperplate. His etchings and dry-points form a subject of undying interest to friends of the graphic arts, and while the totality of his prints, with all their many successive *states* of development, can be found only in the greatest collections of Europe, the exhibition now open in the Print Rooms shows, in a more modest yet gratifying manner, the extent of the Museum's collection of Rembrandt prints.

The chronological arrangement, which seemed best suited to convey an idea of the artist's development, has been made according to the scholarly catalogue of Dr. Woldemar von Seidlitz. There are, beside the numerous signed and dated prints, others without date or even signature, and these

form a battleground for discussion, retention, rejection, and differences of opinion as to the most probable date.

There was a time when every picture which seemed in any way related to Rembrandt was given to that master, just as small provincial galleries still boast a large array of the most illustrious names of Italian art. Knowledge, born of serious, fair-minded research, is gradually clearing away these dear delusions, and minor artists of the past are coming into their own again. What is true of these paintings applies equally to the three hundred and seventy-five plates which Bartsch, in 1797, classified under Rembrandt; some of these are unanimously rejected nowadays, and have been placed in the very last cases of the exhibition. When opinion is divided as to a print, mention will frequently be found to that effect on the label. Some recent revisionists are apt to be too zealous in their rejections, but with the prints before us we can be ourselves the arbiters, and enjoy in them what to us reveals the master's hand.

Different states of the same plate will be found near each other in a good many instances. These show the effect of changes made on the copper by Rembrandt after a number of impressions had been printed from the plate; they also show how the wear of the plate was remedied by retouches, not always Rembrandt's own; lastly, they show the deplorable effect of later clumsy retouches by routine engravers. It will readily be understood, in the light of these examples, that a plate originally etched by Rembrandt would reveal little or nothing of his genius after being thoroughly reworked by some odd-job engraver in the employ of a publisher a century or so later. It must not be inferred from this, however, that the first state of every plate is necessarily the best, since some happy afterthought at times improved the print immensely, after it had yielded a number of impressions.

Going from case to case, we see the young artist forming his hand by large numbers of studies of heads or figures. When none other was at hand, his own face offered a ready means of sharpening his faculties of physical and psychical expression; hence the numerous portraits of himself, smiling, grimacing, frowning, and clad in unusual raiments. We see him alive to the powers of masters of other times and schools, seeking at one time in dramatic exaggeration the marvellous power which soon comes to him with restraint, elimination, and the solved mysteries of light and shade. His interest is all-embracing: portraits, types of mankind, the life and nature which surround him, religion, myth, allegory,—grandeur, pathos, merriment,—all the aspects of life are found in his plates; and if, having seen them, a still more intimate insight into his art be wanted, this will be found in his numerous drawings, excellent reproductions of which may be seen in the study room adjoining the exhibition rooms. E. H. R.

*In connection with this exhibition, the student of Rembrandt should read Mr. C. J. Holmes' interesting essay on "The Development of Rembrandt as an Etcher" (*Burlington Magazine*, Vol. IX., pp. 87, 245, 313, 383, *et seq.*)

Some other recent publications are:
C. Hofstede de Groot, "*Die Urkunden über Rembrandt*," The Hague, 1906.

H. W. Singer, "*Rembrandt: Des Meisters Radierungen*," (Reproductions of all the etchings.) *Klassiker der Kunst VIII*, Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1906.

Sir F. Seymour Haden, "The Etched Work of Rembrandt; True and False," A lecture. London: Macmillan & Co., 1895.

P. G. Hamerton, "The Etchings of Rembrandt," With fifty facsimiles in photogravure and an annotated catalogue of Rembrandt's etchings by Campbell Dodgson. London, 1905.

A. M. Hind, "*Notizen zu Rembrandts Radierungen*," *Reperitorium*, 1905, p. 150 *et seq.*